DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 272 004 FL 015 866

AUTHOR Crochet, Monique Y.
TITLE French for Health and Social Professionals.
PUB DATE May 85
NOTE 10p.; In: Proceedings of the Eastern Michigan University Conference on Languages for Business and the Professions (4th, Dearborn, MI, May 2-4, 1985); see FL 015 835.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Allied Health Occupations Education; Class Activities; *Communicative Competence (Languages); *French; Health Services; Higher Education; *Languages for Special Purposes; Medical Vocabulary; Second Language Instruction; Social Services; *Textbook Content; *Vocabulary Development

ABSTRACT

In response to a need for a college textbook that would be appropriate for a course in French for health and social services professionals, an anthology was developed for second semester intermediate or third year students of French. The book and course are intended to meet the linguistic needs of current and future health care professionals and social workers. The anthology consists of a collection of authentic contemporary articles and excerpts from professional and literary texts dealing with health and social issues and raising philosophical, socioeconomic, and ethical questions. Each selection is accompanied by a list of topical vocabulary and exercises for promoting active use of French in class discussions, opinion exchanges, and role-playing. Thirty-three chapters are organized in the framework of four life stages: birth, childhood and adolescence, adulthood, and old age. This framework reflects the current developmental perspective in health studies. Articles within each stage are grouped by specific issues related to the life stage; each group can be studied as an independent unit, thus providing flexibility. Although publishers are reluctant to publish the text for an estimated small market, and although academic response has been mixed, enthusiastic interest has come from the health/social work profession itself, where the ability to communicate in clients' native languages is highly valued. (MSE)

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FRENCH FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL PROFESSIONALS

By

Dr. Monique Y. Crochet

Department of Foreign Languages & Classics

University of Southern Maine

Portland, Maine

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Rationale for Programs in Languages for Special Purposes

In 1980, the National Assembly on Foreign Language and International Studies, sponsored by the Association of American Colleges, made the following recommendations under the title: "Towards Education with a Global Perspective: AAC Assembly Recommendations":

> - Institutions should seek new and creative ways to foster language instruction. . .
>
> - Institutions should work to increase foreign language instruction in business and professional schools, including law, medicine, and journalism. Even mathematics and sciences would benefit from greater emphasis on foreign language study, which would give students and scholars access to research done in other countries.[1]

The recommendations of the National Assembly on Foreign Language and International Studies were prompted by the observations that the United States is becoming a multilingual society, that ties with other countries are increasing in number and complexity, and that Americans who rely on English being widely used all over the world often find themselves tongue-tied.

In the past ten or fifteen years, the linguistic impact of immigration movements from Southeast Asia, Mexico and Central American countries has been increasingly felt in the U.S. This impact has manifested itself in mounting visual evidence on our streets and our television programs, in our stores and our hospitals. Independence movements which claim the right to the official use of a language, as in Quebec, impose another official language where English used to be spoken.

Also, it is a fact that the world is becoming smaller and that it continues to shrink as satellites allow instant communication between distant countries and as air travel becomes easier and faster. Political and economic problems now involve not only the United States, Europe and the Soviet Union, but the Middle East, China and countries of the Third World as well. In our daily lives, we are influenced by foreign trends and customs, and our personal financial affairs fluctuate with the tides of global economy as the oil crises have proved. International trade involves one out of every eight

American manufacturing jobs, and over 35,000 American business persons live abroad at some point in their careers.

In this new pluralistic society open to foreign influences and vulnerable to international events, new needs have been progressively growing. On the one hand, consumers of goods and/or services require, and sometimes demand, that someone among those attending to their needs be able to communicate in their own language. A visitor from Quebec, for instance, who suddenly needs serious medical assistance in the U.S., has every right to expect that someone among the medical staff will have enough knowledge of French to ask the necessary questions and understand the answers. On the other hand, this need for knowledge of foreign languages, coupled with expertise in busines, industry, law enforcement or health care and human services, creates new job opportunities, and this is a welcome fact in a period of unemployment.

As specialists in foreign languages, it is unquestionably our responsibility to create programs in languages for special purposes. By so doing, we can answer the daily needs of a contemporary society with multiple ethnicities and languages, that is increasingly involved in exchanges with foreign countries. And we can also respond to our students' needs for linguistic proficiency in highly competitive career-related fields, thus giving them an edge over unilingual job seekers.

Documented Evidence of the Need for Professionals with Foreign Language Experience

The need for a knowledge of foreign languages outside of Academe, for the practical purposes of the multiple aspects of daily life was emphasized as far back as 1974. In Lucille Honig and Richard Brod's book, Foreign Languages and Careers, one finds this observation, too often unheeded for all its realism:

> A New York City taxi driver loses a fare because he doesn't know Spanish.--A corporate president waits in silence while an interpreter closes a deal with important Japanese investors.--A nurse in Maine can't diagnose a complaint because the patient is French Canadian.--All of these people could do their work better if they knew a foreign language, yet none of their jobs would seem to require a language. And what about journalists. . .librarians, social workers. . . anthropologists, clergymen, or chemists? According to the Occupational Outlook Handbook published by the U.S. Department of Labor, foreign languages are important for all these positions.[2]

In Academe, a number of students besides foreign language majors feel the need to pursue their study of languages in courses offering a content more applicable to their future careers. Professor Wilga M.

Rivers of Harvard University, in her analysis of a 75-item questionnaire administered to 1,821 students of twelve languages of the University of Illinois at Urbana found that students "would certainly like to see something more than pure literature courses on the one hand and pure grammar on the other. . . .They are interested in many things besides -such as-. . .reading in their own fields. . ."[3]

This interest will be even deeper for students who intend to go to graduate school where their knowledge of a language will facilitate their research. Honig and Brod, in the book mentioned before, indicate that "Specialists in medical research need reading knowledge of languages in which research reports are written. Russian is now the second most frequently used language, after English, in research materials in the biological sciences, followed by German and French. While many articles in foreign languages are eventually translated into English by a centralized service, this is often a slow process--taking as long as twelve months--and in some highly specialized fields, a delay of this kind can seriously retard research."[4]

Concerning health careers specifically, Honig and Brod also state that "Doctors, nurses, laboratory technicians, medical assistants, and hospital administrators are finding more and more that a second language is important--and in some cases essential--in carrying out their duties."[5] It follows that French is extremely valuable for students who plan to exercise their professions in geographical areas where French is widely used. Those areas include Louisiana, where over 291,000 people speak French, and the six states of New England. Maine alone, for example, has a high number of Francophones, as proven by sociological studies. On the percentage of the French-speaking population in Maine, Professor Madeleine Giguere's analysis of the 1980 U.S. Census reveals that 102,285 individuals speak French at home. And of course, there are pockets of French-speaking population in other states as well, such as California, where over 120,000 people speak French, New York with 181,408 people. Here in the state of Michigan, nearly 37,000 individuals speak French.[6] The French-speaking population in the U.S. is increasing to some degree because of the immigration of Haitians.

Honig and Brod's statement regarding health professionals has been corroborated by my own observations and my numerous conversations with nurses, physicians, dentists, and social workers. There is no doubt that knowledge of French can be a very important asset to anyone engaged in Health and Human Services, since it augments both the accuracy of communication and the human dimension of the professional-client relation.

Answering the Need: A French Textbook for Professionals in the Health Sciences and Human Services

My awareness of the need for French-speaking professionals in hospitals, community health centers and human services agencies in New England led me to the decision to teach a course entitled "French for the Health and Social Sciences." The discovery that no college textbook for that purpose existed on the market--whereas there are some in Spanish--led me to prepare one. In fact, the idea of the course and the text originated when I was told of patients who did not receive proper physical or mental medical care because their knowledge of English was inadequate and no one on the hospital staff spoke French.

I have been engaged in the past two and a half years in preparing an anthology entitled Le Francais des professions médicales et sociales. It is a reader for second semester intermediate or third year students of French and it is aimed specifically at the linguistic needs of current and future health care professionals and social workers. Its purpose is to stimulate their incentive to study French and to gain proficiency in it so that they may communicate effectively with their patients or clients.

My textbook consists of a collection of authentic contemporary articles and excerpts from professional and literary texts which deal with health and social issues and which raise philosophical, socio-economic and ethical questions. Each selection is preceded by a list of topical vocabulary and followed by exercises which lead to an active use of French by promoting class participation and discussion among students.

As you can see by the table of contents, the text has thirty-three chapters organized in four parts according to the stages of human life. Each part is divided into dossiers which focus on specific topics related to the stage of life in question. Thus, the first part, La Naissance, presents four dossiers: contraception, abortion, new birthing methods and genetic engineering.

The dossiers are self-sufficient units, each to be studied independently, and contain from one to four chapters, generally two. Since the chapters are also independent units, the book allows for flexible use. Instructors will be able to use the textbook over an entire school year, in combination with an intermediate grammar review, and assign each one of the thirty-three chapters. Or they may decide to use the book over one semester and choose only the selections which are appropriate for their students.

I would like to share with you the method and principles used in the preparation of this textbook. For the overall structure of the book, I chose the four stages of life, birth, childhood and adolescence, adulthood, and finally old age not only because this organization is comprehensive but also because it reflects the current emphasis in health studies curricula on a developmental perspective.

For the selection of the health and social issues presented as topics of discussion, I used information provided by the contemporary press, some advice from a faculty member at the School of Nursing of my university, plain common sense, and my belief that health and social professionals would feel a responsibility to the poor, the weak, and the elderly, as well as to the sick. That is why I included, besides obvious topics such as contraception, drug addiction and cancer, issues such as abuse of children and the impact of solitude on old people.

The selection of the texts was far more arduous. To locate them, I had to rely on my knowledge of French and Quebecer literatures--fiction and non-fiction--and of various articles recently published in France and Quebec. I also used data searches on specific topics and the card catalog of La Bibliotheque Nationale to a great extent. The selection stage itself demanded reading a wide range of material in order to select appropriate texts. I used five criteria in my selection: direct relevance to the topic, intrinsic interest and clarity of ideas (for undergraduate students), unity and completeness of thought development within a few pages, richness of topical vocabulary, and yet relative linguistic facility. I have also tried to find, within a given dossier, texts which complement each other, either by exploring opposing points of view, or by offering the theoretical and applied aspects of a topic or the complementary facets of a problem.

To expand students' vocabulary or to refresh their memory, some words and expressions are glossed in the margins. Marginal glosses are in French as often as possible. Students can also consult the French-English lexicon as well as the two appendices on dentistry and pharmaceutical terminologies.

As I said earlier, each chapter, in addition to the text, contains some pedagogical tools: a vocabulary list or étude du vocabulaire topique, vocabulary exercises or pratique du vocabulaire, comprehension questions or questions sur le texte, discussion topics or échange d'opinions and various activity exercises.

Le vocabulaire topique lists new vocabulary items pertinent to the chapter's theme and found in the reading selection. Therefore, it gives the core vocabulary necessary to understand the text and discuss the issues raised by the text. To those words have been added a few terms related linguistically or thematically and which students may find useful in their oral activities. I decided to present the vocabulary at the very beginning of the chapter so that students may become familiar with them before encountering them in the text, and also get learning reinforcement when they meet the words in context.

-- La pratique du vocabulaire: vocabulary exercises have been designed for two purposes: 1) to encourage students to develop familiarity with the words of the vocabulaire topique, that is to say with the words they will need to communicate with French-speaking patients. In each chapter, the terms given in the core vocabulary have been systematically and carefully integrated into the vocabulary

exercises. 2) to foster in students a feeling for French by having them discover some of the morphological mechanisms of the language, such as the meanings and uses of various affixes; or by encouraging them to use their knowledge of English to discover the meanings of new French words in exercises on cognates, particularly medical and scientific cognates.

The fundamental purpose of all the vocabulary exercises is to help build in students a sense of self-confidence and self-reliance so that, as professionals, they can communicate in French effectively and independently of a teacher's guidance.

The vocabulary exercises appear after the reading so that the text itself may be used as a source of linguistic and semantic references when the students do the exercises. La pratique du vocabulaire represents the third phase of vocabulary learning: first, students study the words in the étude du vocabulaire topique; second, they see those words in context; and third, they are given the opportunity to use them in an active, personal manner.

-- Echange d'opinions: each of the three to five topics is closely linked to the theme of the reading selection and is designed to initiate discussion. Some questions ask students to express their personal opinions or feelings or experiences, while others require that they inform themselves by asking questions of their acquaintances and report their findings to the class. Other topics lead them into projecting themselves into a situation and imagining their own reactions and decisions. The topics always call upon students to express freely their personal experiences, values and points of view.

The two objectives of this type of communicative activity are to provide students with a context in which they can clarify their own values on ethical, social, medical or legal issues and, because of the controversial nature of the topics, to encourage students to express themselves enthusiastically and spontaneously in French.

-- Activité or jeu dramatique professionnel: here again, the topic of the activity relates directly to the social or medical issue raised by the reading. In this open-ended activity, students are invited to "put on the hat" of a health care professional -- physician, therapist, nurse, social worker -- and interact with patients, clients and/or other professionals, in role-playing, interviews, and group situations. This exercise provides students with the opportunity to speak in a framework that uses the material acquired in the chapter. It also encourages them to use French in an imaginative, active and free manner and in situations that mirror American reality.

Establishing Professional Acceptance

In conclusion, I would like to say a few words on the reception given to such a book and the reactions it elicits in various publics.

Commercial publishers, for example, although quick to recognize the quality and value of the book, have been reluctant to publish it for fear the market is too small, and they will not make a profit. However, the University Press of America has accepted it, knowing that my preparation of a camera-ready manuscript will lower publication costs.

The reactions of my colleagues have been mixed. Some of them prefer to limit themselves to critical literary texts in their research. Others, however, have shown interest, and some have been very helpful indeed. And I am most grateful to the administrators of my university who have given their support, both orally, and in terms of grants and released time.

But the most enthusiastic interest has come from the profession itself, whether from students, hospital staff, or social workers. It is with a passage from a letter written by a woman who is Director of of Surgical Nursing at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston that I would like to close this paper because it encourages all of us to continue to associate languages and the professions:

> The ability to communicate is crucial in any of the Health Sciences. Within the nursing profession, it is vital. The nurse who is able to converse with her patient, to discuss many of the important health issues that face all of us today is eminently more valuable than the nurse who cannot understand what the patient is asking her.
>
> As a member of the nursing profession for the last thirty-five years, I have witnessed many situations where a knowledge of the patient's language by the nurse would have been a decided asset, whether the language was Spanish, French, Italian, or Polish.

Notes

1. "Towards Education with a Global Perspective: AAC Assembly Recommendations" in Profession 81 (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1981), pp. 43-44.

2. Lucille J. Honig and Richard I. Brod, Foreign Languages and Careers (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 1974), p. 5.

3. Wilga M. Rivers, "The Non-Major: Tailoring the Course to Fit the Person--Not the Image" in Speaking in Many Tongues: Essays in Foreign-Language Teaching, expanded 2nd ed. -1972; rpt. Rowley, Mass. Newbury House Publishers, Inc., 1976-, pp. 181-182.

4. Honig and Brod, op.cit. pp. 20-21.

5. Ibid., p.20.

6. The figures were provided by Madeleine Giguere, Professor of Sociology at the University of Southern Maine. Madeleine Giguere is also the author of Number and Percent of Persons with French Mother Tongue: States, Countries (parishes), Places of 10,000 or more, SMSA's of 250,000 or more, and Urban and Rural Residence, New England and Louisiana. Compiled and Computed from the 1970 Census of Population. Collection Franco-American Files (University of Maine at Portland-Gorham).